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U. S. Department of Agriculture

Tuesday, August 12, 1930

Housekeeper's Chat

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "Plan Your Christmas Budget Early." Suggestions approved by the Bureau of Home Economics of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Bulletins available: Planning and Recording Family Expenditures; "Home Utilization of Muscadine Grapes."

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I managed to get to the monthly meeting of our Sewing Club the other afternoon. I don't often go, for I haven't time. "Leading this double life", as Uncle Ebenezer puts it, my days are pretty full. But I always enjoy Mrs. Black's meeting, for she has it on her terrace overlooking the loveliest garden and lawn.

I generally bring stockings to darn, but most of the other members do fancy work. And we get lots of talk out of our systems, and go home with a number of new ideas.

All the ideas I took home the other day were as remote as possible from the rose beds and box hedges and velvety lawns we were looking at. They were about Christmas! Can you imagine such a thing, on a warm August afternoon?

You see everyone but myself was making Christmas presents. Bureau scarfs, fancy bags, wool purses, crepe de chine underwear -- all sorts of pretty and practical things to give people. And some things not so practical. Why should anybody want a doll dressed in lavender organdie to cover the telephone -- but you've seen them--

"Goodness!" I said, when they all began to talk about the presents they were making. "Why, I haven't given Christmas a thought! It's only August!"

"Yes, but Christmas presents take a lot of time, if you make them," said one member. "Of course if you intend to buy everything," she suggested somewhat scornfully, "it doesn't make so much difference."

Mrs. Black said she made a list each spring of all the people she wanted to remember and the sort of thing each one would like. Then when she went shopping she picked up nice Christmas gifts she happened to see, or materials to make things with.

That idea sounded all right if you could always be sure of one thing. That is, having enough ready money on hand to pick up the things you want when you see them. It wouldn't be possible for most of us, I know!

"I'll tell you what we do in our family," said little Mrs. Rogers, who was knitting a wash-rag. "We have an agreement among all the relatives not to

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give presents that cost over a quarter. So we see what we can get up for the least money."

"And that explains the wash-rag," I thought to myself. Still, her plan to limit the folks within the family to sensible giving was all right, provided it didn't result in using time and energy making things that weren't worth much after all, or in buying a lot of cheap gifts.

Another good suggestion was made by one of our friends who is a writer by profession. Said she: "The most precious thing I have is leisure time -- I seem to get so little of it. And as my work is writing, all day long, the most generous gift I can make anyone is to write something more. So I send a real newsy, interesting, letter to my kin at a distance. I make it a sort of visit on paper that bridges the gap since our last meeting or last letters. Of course I have to begin those letters a good while before Christmas, but they seem to be liked."

All these plans sounded good, but they did not help my own problem much. Then Mrs. Robinson told about her way of doing.

"I always put Christmas gifts in my budget from the first of January on. So much a week regularly, and anything I happen to save in addition. I don't allow very much-- a dollar a week. Anyone who might be tempted to draw out these special savings could join a bank Christmas Club." "

"Mrs. Robinson is in a position to follow Mrs. Black's plan of picking up things when she sees them, "I said to myself.

Mrs. Robinson added: "I have to cut my list according to my cloth, of course. If I expect to have fifty dollars by Christmas time, then I plan to spend fifty dollars for gifts and no more. I generally have to prune my first estimate, give lower-priced remembrances here and there, but I manage."

I thought this over and in a moment I knew what I could do. There would still be about eighteen weeks before Christmas. Say, fifteen, before the height of the Christmas shopping season. I would be starting late, but if I saved more each week, I could manage to have almost as much as Mrs. Robinson by Christmas. Three dollars a week would be fine.

Besides, you'll always find on my Christmas list some cookies and candies, jellies, relishes, and individual plum puddings. When Christmas is a little closer I'll broadcast all my favorite recipes for that sort of Christmas present. Somebody please remind me in time of candied grapefruit peel, too, both plain and dipped in chocolate. Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without a supply of candied fruit peel.

Now the problem faces me: Where am I to get three dollars every week that I don't need for something already in my budget? That's the rub, as Shakespeare would put it. Might as well face the fact that unless one begins the first of the year with a definite amount planned for Christmas, all one's gifts must be the result of doing without something. Perhaps, after all, those are the nicest gifts. The people who make their presents have the right idea-- putting something of themselves into their remembrances through their work; even the knitted wash-rag is justified from this standpoint!

I must look over our budget for the next fifteen weeks and see where savings can be squeezed out. For one thing, I have decided to make last year's fall hat do again, and I've thought up a lot of menus in which good, nourishing, but low priced foods could be used. And I've decided to make over a silk dress myself, although I had rather hoped to have a dress-maker. Saving labor cost, to my mind, is just as much a way of making something for Christmas as embroidering a centerpiece! The amount saved will buy a centerpiece, come to think of it!

The little ways in which savings can be made are different for each homemaker. So let's have some suggestions from one of my friends in the Bureau of Home Economics who has studied budgets and accounts very closely.

"Get into the habit of scrutinizing all the activities and purchases of the household. Have the other members of the family do so also. How about the ones who leave lights burning unnecessarily? Or the gas heater running too long? Which ones are careless about their clothes, requiring much pressing and cleaning? What about the cost of foods charged and delivered compared with those bought on the cash and carry plan? Even two cents saved on each article bought from the grocer will amount into dollars in a month. What services have been hired that you could perform yourself? Could you save by doing more sewing? What clothing could be made to serve a little longer by repair or remodeling? How often do you, or others in the family, indulge in unneeded sodas or in recreations of temporary satisfaction that could be omitted?

"It is in ways like these that small regular savings can be made and money set aside for more important expenditures. Perhaps another year will seem advisable to begin earlier and spread the necessary self-denial over a longer period. There are choices to be made every day of the year."

I have one question to answer today, from a woman in South Carolina.

"Do you have any publication telling what to do with muscadine grapes, besides making grape juice?"

Yes, we have a very comprehensive bulletin, "Home Utilization of Muscadine Grapes". It tells not only how to make delicious grape juice, but also various kinds of jelly, preserves, catsup and pastes.

Wednesday: "Play Suits of Bright Colors,"

